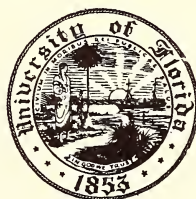


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HENRY VAUGHAN AND THE
HERMETIC PHILOSOPHY



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HENRY VAUGHAN

AND THE HERMETIC PHILOSOPHY

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DATES IN THE LIFE OF HENRY VAUGHAN

BORN 17 April, 1622, at Newton-by-Usk, Brecknockshire.

Taught (with his twin-brother Thomas) by Matthew Herbert, rector of Llangattock.

Went to Jesus College, Oxford, 1638, and studied law ; but left Oxford without taking a degree (Thomas Vaughan also went to Jesus College, and graduated there).

Began to practise as physician in Brecknock, c. 1645.

(1640 Thomas Vaughan presented to living of St. Bridget's, Brecknockshire. 1647 (?) deprived of his living, and removed to Oxford. Died 1666.)

Was at Newton again c. 1650, and continued there as physician.

Died 23 April, 1695.

A TABLE OF THE WORKS OF HENRY VAUGHAN

Poems, with the tenth Satyre of Juvenal, 1646.

Silex Scintillans, 1650.

Olor Iscanus (ready 1647, not published till) 1651, including,
under one title-page (translations),
Of the Benefit Wee may get by our Enemies,
Of the Diseases of the Mind and the Body,
The Praise and Happinesse of the Countrie-Life.

The Mount of Olives : or, Solitary Devotions, 1652, including
(translations),
Man in Darkness, or, A Discourse of Death,
Man in Glory.

Flores Solitudinis, 1654, comprising (translations),
Of Temperance and Patience,
Of Life and Death,
The World Contemned,
Primitive Holiness, set forth in the Life of Blessed Paulinus.

Silex Scintillans, 1655 (including the Second Part).

Hermetical Physick, 1655.

Thalia Rediviva, 1678 (including some verse-translations of the
metres of Boethius).

Olor Iscanus, 1679.

HENRY VAUGHAN AND THE HERMETIC PHILOSOPHY

I

THE reader of this short essay is invited to share in summary the results of an acquaintance with Henry Vaughan pursued a few steps further than the anthologies or even the histories of literature have gone. Vaughan's last and completest editor, Professor L. C. Martin, to whom I owe very much in the way of help and interest, has, in the notes to his edition, shown the path to such a deepened acquaintance ; and has himself progressed in most directions further than I can go. I have added to his researches in one direction mainly—that of Henry Vaughan's connection with the Hermetic or ' occult ' philosophy which his brother Thomas embraced and practised, and so of the poet's relations with his brother and possibly with others of the Hermetic manner of belief, notably Jacob Boehme, but also Cornelius Agrippa, Paracelsus, and others of obscurer name. The explanation suggested here as to the nature of Vaughan's religious experience is put forward on my own responsibility.

Mr. Edmund Blunden's little book on Vaughan¹ appeared about the time that I began to read in the Hermetic writers. A reading, and still more a recent re-reading, of that book convinced me that in Blunden, himself a metaphysical poet, Vaughan has found a critic whose ability to appreciate proceeds from a real

¹ *On the Poems of Henry Vaughan* (London, 1927).

friendship of spirit. I note too in his book some of my own findings about Vaughan, though he stresses more than I the gaiety of the poet, his humour, and the rapture of his 'starry, fountained, infinite dream.'¹ I have tried to discover some sources of that dream ; and found Vaughan, like some other metaphysical poets, a creature of conflict, though conflict of perhaps a different nature from theirs, and tending to become resolved in the alchemy of his mystical poetry.

The explanation which these pages seek to initiate, not complete, shows Vaughan's mysticism, however, to be of a special kind, and of a mixed culture. Various traditions meet in this writer. They are confused, the reader of his poetry cannot perhaps at first disentangle them ; yet if some clues are given he is surprised to find not only what variety of threads are apparent, but also how much clearer on this analysis the pattern looks. He need no longer describe Henry Vaughan vaguely as a 'Nature-mystic,' or a forerunner of Wordsworth only, or on other preferences as a devout Anglican, close follower of George Herbert ; or as an aspirant to the contemporary metaphysical school in verse ; but he may find this poet with all his inequality, his rare beginnings and lame conclusions, his tedious moralisings and fine intuitions, his echoes and at the same time his new rendering of his tradition, unique. Certainly he is the poet of a few poems which among much that is mediocre shine as unforgettable and dateless. He reaches the fruit of his thought and the height of his art in such as 'The World,'² 'The Retreat,'³ 'They are all gone into the world of light,'⁴ and especially in a poem perfect of its kind, 'The Night.'⁵ For 'The Night' is a poem that, unlike many

¹ Blunden. *On the Poems of Henry Vaughan*, p. 41.

² Vaughan, II, 466.

⁴ II, 483.

³ II, 419.

⁵ II, 522.

of Vaughan's poems which describe an epicyclic or zigzag course, develops on perfect curves of thought and image to its end, whether that end be viewed as climax, or as the completion of a symbolic circle with the image of returning to remain 'invisible and dim' in the source which is for Vaughan the divine. The first stanza of 'The World' and the last of 'The Night' present together the two recurring images of the mystics—the circle of light, and, in the Dionysian phrase familiar to so many in Vaughan's age, the 'Ray of Darkness'.¹ But even among the remaining poems are numerous bright flashes, 'strange thoughts' as Vaughan himself has said, transcending perhaps the theme they intend to illustrate. We name here, and reserve for further notice, the poems called 'Resurrection and Immortality',² 'Vanity of Spirit',³ 'The Dawning',⁴ 'Man',⁵ 'Cock-crowing',⁶ 'The Bird',⁷ 'The Timber',⁸ and 'The Book'.⁹ These, and others, become revelations when viewed in the light of some ideas that their writer harboured, and at the angle of his peculiar inner experience.

Vaughan wrote *Silex Scintillans* when the 'metaphysical' fashion in poetry was ready to decline. His link with that fashion is sincere enough for it to have helped him to some of his best expressions, those wherein he is suddenly concentrated, and lucid with a simplicity with which metaphysical poets are not always lucid. He is essentially metaphysical in the wider sense of the word, when he expounds the 'sympathy' that binds the natural world in one, when he interprets this sympathy as flowing from

¹ Dionysius the Areopagite. *De Mystice Theologia*: 'supernaturalis illius caliginis divinae radius' (Migne, col. 999).

² II, 400.

⁵ II, 477.

⁸ II, 497.

³ II, 418.

⁶ II, 488.

⁹ II, 540.

⁴ II, 451.

⁷ II, 496.

a divine source, or lays bare his own longing to return to the source. But he has not the illuminating wit of the best of the metaphysical school; he is, on the one hand, no 'priest of Apollo,'¹ and though, on the other, he often moralises, he has no grace in moralising like George Herbert; he lacks Donne's or Marvell's irony; he cannot clinch like Marvell with his splendid incisiveness tragic or gay, and his fine command of his subject; for to clinch requires a certain quality of intellect, which is the faculty to see boundary-lines and definitions; and Vaughan's real subject is often indefinable and so eludes his effort to present it. Many of his poems, like the lines on 'The Timber,' begin with vivid inspiration, which later dies and leaves the rest of the poem dull and forlorn, because the gleam has returned to its source in the subconscious, and Vaughan's conscious mind, which is not strong or subtle, cannot follow it. He feels too a sense of obscurity; he is aware of falling short of perfect radiance in his spiritual life; and in the poetry, itself less than fully articulate, he is constantly trying to express this sense. This again is the sign of a persistent groping towards some elusive memory, some half-forgotten happiness, which seldom swims into his clearer ken, but soothes him while it provokes with its promises of peace and delight—the pushing into flower again of his 'shootes of everlastingnesse,'² or the capacity to 'travell back'³ to the 'early dayes'⁴ and 'first, happy age'⁵ which he dwells on in 'The Retreate' and elsewhere. In 'Cock-crowing' and in other poems he attempts to describe this sense of obscurity and half-defeat.

¹ See Carew's 'An Elegy upon the Death of Dr. Donne,' ll. 95-6.

² 'The Retreate,' II, 419.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ 'Looking Back,' II, 640.

Onely this Veyle which thou hast broke,
And must be broken yet in me,
This veyle, I say, is all the cloke
And cloud which shadows thee from me.
This veyle thy full-ey'd love denies,
And only gleams and fractions spies.¹

But it may be said that with him as with other mystics the 'gleams and fractions' are themselves responsible for the dimmer intervals which he experiences, as transient light outlines the dark ; and that when they occur he is able by their light to transcend the themes of other poets who are better artists.

¹ II, 488.

II

VAUGHAN has been viewed as a Nature-mystic, a mystic of the Anglican Church, and a platonic poet. He is not 'platonical' like Henry More, whose platonism, fantastic as the expression of it may appear in his verse, is a philosophical scheme arrived at by reasoning and synthesis. Vaughan, though he speculated much, did not much rationalise or formulate; his thought is fused into image as it passes into consciousness; and even that belief in the pre-existence of souls with which he has been credited,¹ is never openly declared. He is platonic in his continual conviction of an invisible presence behind or within the visible, and the peculiar presentation in his poetry of a natural world which is entirely sentient, and in contact with the sentient heart, not merely visible to the sensuous eye. His intercourse with this Nature alternates between conscious discipleship and a kind of unconscious interpenetration² of himself with a 'Spirit' which his special philosophy taught him to find in the objects of Nature, but which he could not have found had not some inner experience of his own sharpened his investigation. By means of this intercourse he describes not so much external Nature as the results of the interpenetration in terms of natural

¹ E.g. in *Les Doctrines Médiévales chez Donne*, by M. P. Ramsay (Oxford, 1917), p. 32: 'Il adopte la thèse plotinienne de la préexistence dans le monde intelligible des âmes humaines.'

² In Shelley's use of the word. Compare the 'Lines written among the Euganean Hills.'

images. He heard the 'shrill'¹ voice of springs and the 'whisper'² of leaves ; he saw the climbing or falling mountain mists and the distant, kindling light of stars ; but an inward voice was needed as well to recollection, which when it spoke, spoke in terms of Nature of a further and perhaps deeper reality.

I . . . came at last
To search my selfe, where I did find
Traces, and sounds of a strange kind.
Here of this mighty spring, I found some drills,
With Ecchoes beaten from th'eternall hills ;³

This special experience awaits our discussion. But it may be noted how different a poet of Nature he is from the Nature-loving Marvell, who with a stronger sense of objectivity, and a keen and admiring eye for the 'endless variety' of things, sees rather a different earth from Vaughan's, and knows himself as comrade of the creatures rather than disciple. When Marvell imagines himself a tree, the process and result are quite different from those when Vaughan so imagines ; his witty grasshoppers perched on the 'unfathomable' grass of Appleton meadow ('Where Men like Grasshoppers appear, But Grasshoppers are Gyants there,' and 'in there squeking Laugh, contemn Us as we walk more low then them')⁴ have another outlook than Vaughan's devout and single-hearted cock ;⁵ and his flowers, 'Tulip Pinke and Rose' 'at parade,'⁶ act quite otherwise from Vaughan's hidden herbs and violets.⁷ Even that wonderful

¹ 'Vanity of Spirit,' II, 418.

² 'Joy,' II, 491 ; 'Rules and Lessons,' II, 436.

³ 'Vanity of Spirit,' II, 418.

⁴ 'Upon Appleton House.' Marvell, I, 70.

⁵ 'Cock-crowing,' II, 488.

⁶ 'Upon Appleton House.' Marvell, I, 68.

⁷ Compare, e.g., some references in the poems 'The Favour,' II, 492 ; 'The Seed growing secretly,' II, 510 ; 'Death,' II, 533.

passing vision, the 'Saphir-winged Mist' of the kingfisher in the twilight,¹ is more sensuous, more independent, more superbly actual, than the creatures of the Silurist's world. Or again, when as 'easie Philosopher' Marvell 'confers' among the birds and trees, and delights in imagining man's metamorphosis—

Give me but wings as they, and I
Streight floting on the Air shall fly :
Or turn me but, and you shall see
I was but an inverted Tree.

—he is only accentuating the natural privilege of that other bird, his mind, which can fly to 'other Worlds' and 'other Seas'² of its own creating; and even when he is 'Annihilating all that's made To a green Thought in a green Shade'³ he is taking the tree's attributes into his securer possession. Vaughan in his own poem 'The Timber,' looking into the heart of the dead wood that was once a tree, where now 'not so much as dreams of light may shine,' 'philosophises' by shifting his centre to that of the tree; and seems to lose himself in reverie of its former life with the continual changes of sun and storm, and the harbouring of the 'many light Hearts and Wings Which now are dead.'⁴ He recreates the tree's life, and for a time he lives in it. Throughout the range of imagery of his special, almost his single kind, he is one of the most intimate of poets. To describe what he is or what he would be, without taking conscious thought he turns to Nature—

¹ 'Upon Appleton House.' Marvell, I, 80. Mr. G. Williamson in *The Donne Tradition* (Harvard University Press, 1930), remarks on the 'artificial character of Marvell's images of Nature' (pp. 156-8). I think he is right; and yet feel at the same time the original and vigorous delight of Marvell in the natural life surrounding him.

² 'The Garden.' Marvell, I, 49.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ 'The Timber,' II, 497.

The Blades of grasse, thy Creatures feeding,
 The trees, their leafs ; the flowres, their seeding ;
 The Dust, of which I am a part,
 The Stones much softer than my heart,
 The drops of rain, the sighs of wind,
 The Stars to which I am stark blind,
 The Dew thy herbs drink up by night,
 The beams they warm them at i' th' light. . . .¹

For all these creatures can in some way represent him.

And yet, though he describes himself as Silurist,² and numerous poems image the scenery of lake and hill and river around him, he presents a Nature *sub specie æternitatis*, almost without a local habitation. The reader of his verses may indeed recognise fragments of an actual surrounding scene in the image of 'this hill' 'drest' in the 'faint beams' remaining after sunset ;³ or of 'That drowsie Lake' ;⁴ or 'This late, long heat' ;⁵ or of the streams appearing in *Silex Scintillans*, which, not belonging entirely to a world of symbols as do for instance Shelley's rivers, not fully actual like Wordsworth's Derwent and Yarrow, keep a middle nature between the imagined and the real, by virtue of which they become representative of the poet's inner life.

as this restless, vocall Spring
 All day and night doth run, and sing,
 And though here born, yet is acquainted
 Elsewhere, and flowing keeps untainted. . . .⁶

They flow in the hills of Vaughan's native Brecon,

¹ 'Repentance,' II, 448-9.

² As a native of Brecknockshire, the country of the old Silures. 'You know that Silures contayned Breconockshire, Herefordshire, etc.' (*Aubrey's Brief Lives*, ed. A. Clark. Oxford, 1898. Vol. II, p. 269.)

³ 'They are all gone into the world of light,' II, 483.

⁴ 'The Showre,' II, 412.

⁵ 'The Tempest,' II, 460.

⁶ 'The Dawning,' II, 452.

but like the rest of Nature they are symbolic of 'Eden' and the 'first estate.'

Again, his natural images are seen through the veil of his special desire. There are few clear open pictures, like those in Milton's cosmic landscape, of setting sun,¹ for instance, or moon rising in 'peerless light';² or the series of scenes, clear as cameos, in *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*. Here and there Vaughan has images which suggest the scenery of dreams, uncoloured and unappropriated.

who stays

Here long must passe
O're dark hills, swift streames, and steep ways
As smooth as glasse.³

He does not write of the world in terms of 'beauty,' like his contemporary and in some respects his fellow, Traherne, who sees all suffused with radiance, 'a mirror of infinite beauty,'⁴ 'an illimited field of Variety and Beauty,'⁵ and 'this little Cottage of heaven and Earth'⁶ become the 'Palace' of God, where man is not an outcast as with some writers in this seventeenth century, or an alien as with Vaughan, but the inheritor of the resplendent earth. Traherne loves the great 'creatures'—the sun; the sea; the air, 'a living miracle';⁸ the riches of the natural light. Vaughan broods on Nature in aspects of its sentience, and of a 'sympathy' whose special connotation needs to be explained; he dives into the heart of particular creatures; he seeks to merge himself and be lost in the midst of the natural scene, as at the end of 'The Night' he seeks to merge himself in the Divine; and

¹ *P.L.*, IV, 591-7.

² *Ibid.*, 606-9.

³ 'Joy of my life! while left me here,' II, 423.

⁴ Traherne, *Centuries*, p. 21.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

often he is grieved because he cannot so be merged and lost. At such times and in such moods he is that universal poet whom Mrs. Meynell once analysed :

Pines thy fallen nature ever
For the unfallen Nature sweet.¹

And when again the word 'fallen' recalls us to Vaughan's own century, to the other religious poets and the theologians, to all the tops of speculation and to the unfortunate *massa damnata* itself, we remember that he has much to say of man as well as of the rest of Nature, of man in exile, straying, and seeking to return to a lost happiness whose symbol is 'Eden'² or the 'early dayes.' Sometimes the objects of the natural world retrieve this Eden,

When on some *gilded Cloud*, or *flowre*
My gazing soul would dwell an houre,
And in those weaker glories spy
Some shadows of eternity.³

Sometimes they too 'their heads lift, and expect' redemption.⁴ But in either case they continually plead to Vaughan the recollection and 'retreat' he describes himself as seeking. Exiled as he was from political interests by the defeat of the Royalist party, and secluded in the quiet of his Welsh birthplace, he found traces of his lost paradise among the Silurian hills and streams. There too he experienced the 'conversion' which set him on their track.

¹ Alice Meynell, 'To Any Poet,' *Poems*, p. 55.

² E.g., in 'Corruption,' II, 440.

³ 'The Retreat,' II, 419.

⁴ 'And do they so? Have they a Sense?' II, 432.

III

WHAT happened between Vaughan's *Olor Iscanus* and his *Silex Scintillans*? Some experience, chiefly inward, even if partly educed by outward events, made of a dilettante in the metaphysical school the poet of 'The Retreate,' 'The World,' and 'The Night,' and those other poems where he meditates on the eternal aspects of flowers, grass, trees, creatures, and men. Palinodes were the fashion in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; and Vaughan, in the rather harsh preface to his new book, repudiates his earlier verse. Conversions were frequent, though less marked in the tradition of the Anglican Church, in the line of Andrewes, Donne, and Herbert, than among the ecstatic, combative sects. We perceive that between Donne's earlier and later poetry there is no such bridge to be crossed as with Vaughan; divine and profane employ the same symbols. And between Vaughan's conflict and that of his master Herbert there is a difference to be noted, and between their best poems a world of difference. Vaughan claims for Herbert the credit of his 'conversion'; yet what he awakened to was not Herbert's strenuous, punctual piety. Throughout *Silex Scintillans*, consciously, or sometimes perhaps unconsciously, he echoes Herbert's poetry. He comes forward to answer the plea of Herbert's 'Obedience'¹ in his own poem 'The Match.'² In 'Obedience' Herbert offers his poem as a 'deed' to God; and then, after ex-

¹ Herbert, II, 387.

² II, 434.

cluding certain possible claimants, such as Pleasure or his own will, concludes

He that will passe his land
As I have mine, may set his hand
And heart unto this deed, when he hath read,
And make the purchase spread
To both our goods, if he to it will stand.

How happie were my part,
If some kinde man would thrust his heart
Into these lines ; till in heav'n's court of rolls
They were by winged souls
Entred for both, farre above their desert !

And Vaughan, addressing his own poem to Herbert, the 'Dear friend' whose 'holy, ever-living lines Have done much good To many,' and among those many to himself, comes forward to fulfil the wish.

Here I joyn hands, and thrust my stubborn heart
Into thy *Deed*.

And in truth he does make it possible that many lines and phrases in *The Temple* shall be 'entred for both.' Any careful reader of the two poets may well be astonished at the devotion of this disciple and plagiarist, and at the persistency of the echoes in *Silex Scintillans*. Vaughan begs titles from Herbert, and while he draws a title from one poem in *The Temple*, goes in debt to another for images or phrases. Cross-correspondences between a group of poems appear frequently ; and frequently, too, not possessing Herbert's ready wit or lyric finish, he appears as the borrower who does not 'better.' But the reader who will go further perceives before long the deeper difference ; he finds him at rarer moments transforming his borrowings, giving them a new dress that quite alters their aspect ; or

finds him in those remoter places where Herbert never came. Vaughan's traditions were those of the Anglican Church, and he is outspokenly loyal ; but his poetry confesses as well an older allegiance. His devotion moreover towards the Church is crossed by other elements—strange hieroglyphs, colours and fragments of antiquity, alien to orthodox religion. And he stresses revelations that orthodoxy had sometimes forgotten.

No mercy-seat of gold,
No dead and dusty *Cherub*, nor carv'd stone
But his own living works did my Lord hold
And lodge alone ;
Where *trees* and *herbs* did watch and peep
And wonder. . . .¹

Even the Emblem to *Silex Scintillans*,² or the Dedication with its octosyllables pleading so naïvely against 'ev'ry publish'd vanity Which thou divinely hast forgiven,'³ are less closely characteristic than those poems where, instead of the plea of sin and a divine sacrifice—that which meant so much to Donne or Herbert or Crashaw—he compares himself with herb or star, bird or stone, creatures which have kept their obligations ;⁴ and looks for the atoning spirit which shall repair the broken links in the creation.

To understand Vaughan's 'conversion,' and the change between *Olor Iscanus* and *Silex Scintillans*, we take the hints he gives us in his Preface to the latter—the mention of an illness which brought him, he said, 'nigh unto death,'⁵ and the tribute paid to Herbert, with the claim of being 'the least' among Herbert's 'pious *Converts*.'⁶ To these we add the fact of his

¹ 'The Night,' II, 522.

² See p. 61.

³ II, 395.

⁴ 'Obligations' in the literal sense. See account of 'sympathy' *infra*.

⁵ II, 392.

⁶ II, 391.

seclusion in Scethrog, and his relations with his twin-brother Thomas, who, deprived of his clerical living by Cromwell's Independents, began or resumed the study of alchemy and of the Hermetic philosophy of Cornelius Agrippa. Thomas Vaughan, like his brother, was a curious reader. He knew something of the Rosicrucians, recent adventurers in 'occult' experience; of the writings ascribed to the shadowy Trismegistus; and of other Hermetic writers. He attempted metaphysical poetry himself, and like other metaphysical poets he knew the 'right-ey'd Areopagite,'¹ Dionysius. He knew Herbert too, well enough at any rate to travesty him;² and gives evidence of some knowledge of the writings of Jacob Boehme. The brothers had been brought up together, they went to the same school and University, and for a few years at least they were both practising their several professions in Brecknockshire, Thomas as divine, Henry as physician. As with Robert Burton thirty years before, it would seem that with both brothers these interests crossed and mingled. Both, too, explored the natural world in search of hidden meanings. Even when Thomas Vaughan left Brecon and pursued his studies of alchemy in Oxford and London, the brothers must have been in contact, and contact, it seems, of an intimate kind; for then it is that the closest outward correspondence occurs, in various parallel phrases and images which appear in *Silex Scintillans* and in some of Thomas Vaughan's treatises. Like *Silex*

¹ Crashaw, ed. Martin, p. 259, 'The Epiphanie of our Lord.'

² In *Anima Magica Abscondita* (p. 47) he adapts a stanza of Herbert's 'Gratefulnesse' (Herbert, III, 43). He describes the true 'magician's' preparations for the entrance of the divine spirit into matter. 'Thou must tyre him out with pious importunities.

*Perpetuall knockings at his Doore,
Teares sullyng his transparent Roomes,
Sighes upon sighes : weep more and more,
He comes.'*

Scintillans, several of these treatises were published in 1650.

We do not know when Henry Vaughan, poet and physician, first came in contact with these Hermetic traditions, which to poetry as to medicine proposed fresh fields. He may have known them since his Oxford days, though there is nothing indicative of his later deep apprehension of them in *Olor Iscanus*. Their influence, like the influence of Herbert, may have reached him at the time of his 'conversion,' this particular time when he was more than ordinarily impressionable ; and revived or sharpened latent powers of intuition. His rendering of the traditions is unique ; it is different from the reading his brother gives in those treatises of approved Hermetic nomenclature—*Anima Magica Abscondita*, *Anthroposophia Theomagia*, *Magia Adamica*, *Lumen de Lumine*, and others—different even in the midst of the striking resemblance we have mentioned, and which will presently be illustrated. Henry's interpretation is finer, less credulous perhaps on some points, but more religious ; and here again not only because the Hermetic tradition met the Catholic, and deepened it, and was in its turn refined ; but also because between them and enriching both lies some individual experience of the poet.

This experience was, as we have suggested, rather a 'recollection' than a conversion. Yet psychologically much conversion is of the nature of recollection ; it is an upheaval of the subconscious into consciousness, under pressure of supreme emotion, or at a time when the ordinary bodily claims are weakened. One who had been, as Vaughan says of himself, 'nigh unto death' would be peculiarly liable ; and many persons, though perhaps in lesser degree, may have felt a conviction of a revival that has seemed spiritual as

well as physical, almost the sense of a 're-birth,' in the first days of convalescence. We can know that Vaughan's nature was subject to such impressions ; for he could experience an ordinary awakening from sleep as a kind of re-birth (here again perhaps the experience is common), and feel that in sleep some process of purification, of re-integration at a primal source, had been at work upon him.

with what flowres,
And shoots of glory, my soul breakes, and buds !
All the long houres
Of night, and Rest
Through the still shrouds
Of sleep, and Clouds,
This Dew fell on my Breast ;¹

In the same poem this sense of recreation leads to the sense of a common consciousness with Nature ; and may it not have been that, secluded in Scethrog from the world of society and action, and still further withdrawn by a severe illness, Vaughan read Herbert's poetry and read or re-read some Hermetic books, and descending into his own mind, saw or thought he saw a glimpse of the origins of creation, and of what he calls in one of his poems the 'tye of Bodyes,'² inaugurating thereby a desire which was to haunt him all the remainder of his life ? Readers of W. H. Hudson's books will remember the experience described in *Far Away and Long Ago*, where the writer tells how in recovering from a long illness he saw all his childhood spread out in memory before him.³ Readers of Blake will remember how (and this too is the account of an experience which a temperament like Blake's might undergo repeatedly)

¹ 'The Morning-Watch,' II, 424.

² 'Sure, there's a tye of Bodyes!' II, 429.

³ Hudson. Chapter I, pp. 3-4.

I remain'd as a child ;
 All I ever had known
 Before me bright shone :¹

Between Vaughan's outlook and Hudson's there are some close analogies. Both possess an intuition by which they 'see into the life of things.'² And in his chapter called 'A Boy's Animism' Hudson describes 'this sense' he had 'of the supernatural in natural things.'³ He experiences a magical influence from trees, and feels too that some trees in particular are 'intensely alive,' although this peculiar effect is felt 'not only in moonlit trees or in a flower or serpent, but in certain exquisite moments and moods and in certain aspects of nature, in "every grass" and in all things, animate and inanimate.'⁴ The reader of Henry Vaughan has only to turn to such poems as 'The Bird,'⁵ 'The Timber,'⁶ or 'The Book'⁷ to discover how closely this account could fit the seventeenth-century worshipper of Nature. Vaughan also, for all the self-accusations found in some poems, possessed with Blake the simplicity and candour of heart which made them each the lover of children and of humble creatures, of morning and purity and the springing resilient life of earth.

Both Christian and Hermetic teaching reiterate 'Ye must be born again'⁸ . . . 'become as little children.' The upheaval of the subconscious mind

¹ 'To Thomas Butts,' Blake, ed. Sampson, p. 186.

² Wordsworth, *Tintern Abbey*.

³ Hudson, op. cit., p. 226.

⁴ Ibid., pp. 231-33.

⁵ II, 496.

⁶ II, 497.

⁷ II, 540.

⁸ St. John, III, 7. (The Greek is γεννηθῆναι ἄνωθεν; but the significance remains the same.) With this N.T. passage compare the discourse of 'Hermes Trismegistus to his son Tat, concerning Rebirth' (*Hermetica*, vol. I, p. 239): '... You said that no one can be saved until he has been born again. ... I know not, thrice-greatest one, from what womb a man can be born again, nor from what seed.'

may mean the uncovering of those lowest layers of memory which record the experiences of pre-natal life. Such a glimpse would seem to the experient to reveal the unity underlying all the life of Nature, and the essential affinity between man and the rest of Nature (this is the origin and significance of the state known as 'cosmic consciousness'); and might, as we think possible in Vaughan's case, haunt him for ever after with a conviction of exile from a once-known peace and purity, and a vague apprehension of some mysterious beauty which would seem to him to have had no beginning in time—the 'Something I can never find, Something lying on the ground, In the bottom of my mind'¹ according to one modern poet, or 'The flagstone under all, the fire of fires, The roots of the world'² of another. To Vaughan, in the seventeenth century, and in the midst of speculation theological, Platonic, and Hermetical, the symbol is 'Eden'; or the 'early days'; or the 'first, happy age'; or perhaps the patriarchs, 'those first white Pilgrims,'³ who in many poems are typical,⁴ since they, like the subject of 'The Retreate,' had not yet walked 'Above a mile or two' from Eden; or (as we shall presently see) any of those symbols of the alchemists which are designed to denote the utmost perfection in Nature. Or again, the symbol is morning, childhood, whiteness, in its aspects of refreshment; or 'the wombe of things,'⁵ the 'mothers bosome,'⁶ night, the 'eternal hills,' in its aspects of untroubled and self-forgetting peace. Even perhaps it is the 'deep but dazzling darkness' of God, where, weary of the sun which here symbolises the world, he might 'live invisible and dim.'⁷

¹ James Stephens, 'The Goat Paths.' ⁵ 'Resurrection and Immortality,'

² W. B. Yeats, *The Shadowy Waters*. II, 401.

³ 'The day of Judgement,' II, 531. ⁶ 'Death,' II, 400.

⁴ See, e.g., 'Corruption,' II, 440. ⁷ 'The Night,' II, 523.

I . . . came at last
 To search my selfe, where I did find
 Traces, and sounds of a strange kind.
 Here of this mighty spring, I found some drills,
 With Ecchoes beaten from th'eternall hills.¹

Others in this seventeenth century when they 'came to search themselves' might find, at different levels of their minds, rather different elements. Donne could at one time find 'Despair behind, and death before,'² or, again, the mingled fear and fascination which the thought of death could bring alternating with flights of a troubled joy, and an overwhelming impression of divine transcendence. Herbert found the ceaseless fluctuations of hope and anxiety in a soul more sensitive than strong. Bunyan saw personal terror, and afterwards sheer relief; as George Fox saw both terror and love projected over the world in his vision of the oceans of darkness and light.³ Jacob Boehme told how, searching his own spirit, he saw 'the Eye which is God,' 'the Natureless creatureless Deity . . . Who also in himself willethe no more but only to find and comprehend himself, and to go forth from himself,' and so to create 'time, and Eternity; Heaven, Hell; the world, light, and darkness; paine, and *Source*; life, and death; Something and Nothing.'⁴ Boehme deliberately strove to reach the beginning, the 'without form,' the abyss seen in glimpses by those whose nature impels them to penetrate the depths of the subconscious; and the symbolisation of what he saw affords the content of most of what he wrote, while he attempted to depict the agonies of generation in

¹ 'Vanity of Spirit,' II, 418.

² *Holy Sonnets*, I. Donne, *Poems*, ed. Grierson, I, 322.

³ Fox, *Journal*, p. 13. 'I saw also, that there was an *Ocean of Darkness and Death*; but an infinite *Ocean of Light and Love*, which flowed over the *Ocean of Darkness*.'

⁴ Boehme, *XL Questions*, p. 42.

the divine or human spirit. Vaughan's younger contemporary Traherne tells of a realisation akin to Vaughan's own ; for—without dwelling at all on that factor of ' death unto sin ' which Herbert's convert could not altogether leave out—Traherne flies straight to his mark, and writes of the recollection of and return to a state of happiness and purity known during the first years of life, and between which and the later realisation had fallen, as he describes it in the *Centuries of Meditations*, a time of spiritual dulness and distraction. In both prose and poetry he depicts such a state as Vaughan images after a different fashion in ' The Retreate ' ; but whereas Vaughan, feeling himself alienated, longs to ' travell back,' Traherne claims to have attained again and to enjoy. He seems to be writing from some later radiant conviction, and seeing the early days enhanced in its light. The state which in the poems he tries to describe is one of learning yet of possession, something belonging to childhood yet deeper than a child's first conscious knowledge. Sometimes it appears as even earlier in time than the limpid intercourse suggested by

He in our childhood with us walks,
And with our thoughts mysteriously He talks.¹

for in ' The Praeparative,'² it is that of ' My Body being dead, my Limbs unknown ' ; or in another part of the same poem that of

an inward Sphere of Light . . .
All Life, all Sense,
A naked, simple, pure intelligence.

Such a description, or that of the sense of ' naked, simple Life ' ³ in another poem, a sense so strong that

¹ ' The Approach,' Traherne, *Poems*, p. 69.

² Ibid. *Poems*, p. 13.

³ ' My Spirit.' Ibid. *Poems*, p. 73.

the act of perception and the thing perceived merge in 'the Substance of the mind,' may remind the reader of some of Wordsworth's poignant solitary moods. Here, however, it seems to point to a belief in the writer in the pre-existence of human souls. It resembles too Henry More's doctrine of the soul revolving on itself and reflecting, and able to 'uncase' matter 'of all her forms,' and discover 'a nak'd simple essence.'¹ The soul in More is 'tri-central,' with its highest part awake perhaps from eternity; but all three parts are pre-existent. In Thomas Vaughan's philosophy also the souls have 'an Explicite Methodicall knowledge' 'before their Intrace into the body.'² Henry Vaughan, though he writes in 'The Retreate' of a 'second race,'³ and in 'The Waterfall' of human souls as coming from 'a sea of light,'⁴ never declares in positive phrase a belief in pre-existence. With him it is the return to source that is stressed—the 'backward steps';⁵ the 'love turn'd retrograde,'⁶ as his own expressive English renders one of the metres of Boethius, giving it his own inflection of thought.

To Traherne as to Vaughan childhood is a state of candid and undisturbed purity,

Ev'n like the Streams of Crystal Springs,
Where all the curious things
Do from the bottom of the Well appear.⁷

The 'curious things' at 'the bottom of the well' recall Vaughan's 'strange sounds' and 'traces'⁸ when he came to search himself; or that recollection of the 'eternal mind' which haunts the child in

¹ More, *Psychathanasia*, p. 53.

² T. Vaughan, *Anthroposophia Theomagica*, p. 2.

³ II, 419.

⁴ II, 527.

⁵ 'The Retreate,' II, 420.

⁶ II, 633.

⁷ 'The World,' Traherne, *Poems*, p. 26.

⁸ 'Vanity of Spirit,' II, 418.

Wordsworth's *Ode*.¹ 'Childhood,' writes Traherne,

might itself alone be said
My Tutor, teacher, Guide to be ;
Ev'n then Instructed by the Deity.²

or, again, in another poem,

To Infancy, O Lord, again I com,
That I my Manhood may improv :
My early Tutor is the Womb.³

And we notice a passage in Boehme's *XL Questions Concerning the Soule* which is of interest to us here, and arresting in an age which believed with Donne and Augustine that 'as soon as wee are any thing, wee are sinners, and there, where there can be no more tentation ministered to us, than was to the Angels, that fell in heaven, that is, in *our mothers wombe*.'⁴ Boehme writes

Little children are our Schoolmasters till evill stirre in them . . . they bring their sport from the Mothers wombe, which is a Remnant of Paradise : but all the rest is gone till we shall receive it againe.⁵

The coincidence with Traherne's poetry is striking. Perhaps the latter, who was widely read, a student of Plato and Plotinus, and also of Pico della Mirandola,⁶ had found out Jacob Boehme, whose writings had just become accessible in the translations of John Sparrow. Thomas Vaughan knew Boehme's *The Three Principles* at least, and praises it in a note to his own *Magia Adamica* ;⁷ and we may think it probable, though we have no proof, that Henry, with his love

¹ Wordsworth, 'Ode on Intimations of Immortality.'

² 'The Approach,' Traherne, *Poems*, p. 70.

³ 'The Return,' *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁴ Donne, *Fifty Sermons*, p. 187.

⁵ Boehme, *XL Questions*, p. 130.

⁶ Compare the *Centuries*, p. 298.

⁷ T. Vaughan, *Magia Adamica*, p. 110 (note).

of the curious, his taste for speculation, and the close correspondence which (as we shall further show) exists between the writings of the brothers, read too in Boehme's voluminous and deep though not many-sided treatises. Ideas, however, are in the air at certain periods ; there are, as Dr. Denis Saurat has pointed out, ' zones ' of ideas ;¹ and within these zones, as within zones of infection, certain spirits are peculiarly susceptible. Many epidemic ideas visited the seventeenth century ; and Plato and Plotinus were studied by select thinkers, and Pico had brought the Cabbala into wider repute. Writers and thinkers do not always take the infection direct from each other ; they yield perhaps to the surrounding influence. We do not know why Vaughan and Traherne both expressed themselves as desiring to 'travell back,' nor why this special awareness is felt in English poetry for the first time here. But in connection with Boehme we remember that Vaughan too when he gazed at childhood thought

How do I study now, and scan
Thee, more than ere I studyed man.²

and longed by studying to learn to 'retreat,' although, as he tells us, he seems to himself to be looking through a 'long night' at the 'edges' and 'bordering light' only of that strange and happy time.

Again, his sense of affinity with herb and flower, and even with dust and stones, may have been developed in some such subconscious process as we have tried to indicate. For he not only believed with the Hermetists in the 'tye of bodies,'³ but he felt the tie ; and the expression of his sense of kinship with

¹ D. Saurat, *Literature and Occult Tradition*, trans. D. Bolton (London, 1930), pp. 59-60.

² 'Childe-hood,' II, 521.

³ 'Sure, there's a tye of Bodyes !' II, 429.

the creatures of Nature leaves a curious impression in the reader's mind of a tie strong as the physical or even the uterine link, forged before consciousness in 'the wombe of things.'¹ The poetry embodying this half-conscious desire for unity and re-absorption has much of the quality known as 'atmosphere'; it retains if not memories at least what Matthew Arnold calls 'murmurs and scents.' It gives a different impression from that which Traherne's poetry gives, and quite different from the effect of More's philosophical poetry, different too once more from the effect gained in reading that fantastic, credulous spirit, his own brother. Henry Vaughan is more reserved, more sensitive, and at the same time more deeply involved.

¹ Vaughan, 'Resurrection and Immortality,' II, 401.

IV

BUT linked with this sense of affinity and sympathy we meet with a definite tradition and technology, and must proceed to quote and explain a few terms from the Hermetic or 'occult' philosophy, since only through an understanding of some such terms and symbols can Henry Vaughan's poetry and faith be fully appreciated. We need in this place quote no more than those which serve this purpose.

The Hermetic philosophy, with its traditional beginnings lodged not only with Moses or the mythical Hermes Trismegistus, but referred back by some of its adherents to Seth, Enoch, Adam, or even to the lapsed angels of the story in the sixth chapter of *Genesis*, was probably of Chaldæan origin, but was closely akin at some points to the traditions of the Jewish Cabbala; gave hints to Pythagoras, and to Plato in the *Timæus*; and embodied much of itself in Gnosticism. Later it reached mediaeval Europe through its Arabian practitioners and exponents, and was revived as a field for inquiry and mystic speculation after the Renaissance, while its ancient sciences of astrology and alchemy continued uninterruptedly from its Chaldæan and Egyptian days. As a philosophy it appears in the work of Post-Renaissance scholars such as Pico della Mirandola; and inspires the *De Occulta Philosophia* of Cornelius Agrippa, and the strange collection ascribed to Paracelsus. Many lesser investigators, of varying degrees of learning, practical sagacity, credulity and mysticism, are engaged on it,

like those whose writings appear in a volume styled *The Hermetic Museum*, which was published at Frankfort in 1648. Such an investigator was Thomas Vaughan, who when forced from his clerical living after the Independent victory began writing under the pseudonym of Eugenius Philalethes on a subject which had perhaps interested him for long. He acknowledges his debt to Agrippa, to whom 'next to God I owe all that I have'¹ (and though, as in the case of Boehme, we cannot prove that Henry Vaughan read Agrippa, we shall have to show there too some curious analogies); and rejects the 'Peripatetickes,' who 'look on God, as they do on Carpenters, who build with Stone and Timber, without any infusion of life. But the world, which is God's building, is full of Spirit, quick, and living.'² So, after their different ways, the world appears to Agrippa and Paracelsus, Jacob Boehme and Henry Vaughan. The 'elves of hills, brooks, standing lakes, and groves' are verities to Agrippa and Paracelsus,³ and it is not difficult to 'start a spirit.'

The Hermetic doctrines were of a nature to appeal to that special kind of mediaevalism which lingered on in Europe till past the first half of the seventeenth century. As pure luxury of speculation they would attract such 'extravagant and irregular heads'⁴ as those of Sir Thomas Browne or certain metaphysical poets. The metaphysical poets indeed, in their hope to track the quintessential beauty whether abstract or embodied, are first cousins to the alchemists. Milton amidst his wide classic knowledge knew the Cabbala well; and he too, for all his rational, liberal tendencies, presents in *Paradise Lost* a scheme having

¹ T. Vaughan, *Anthroposophia Theomagia*, p. 50. ² Ibid., Sig. B3b.

³ Compare Paracelsus (ed. Waite), vol. II, p. 269. 'There are many worlds: and we are not the only beings in our own world. . . . We are not the only beings made; there were many more whom we do not know.'

⁴ Browne, *Religio Medici*, p. 12.

features in common with the scheme of the Gnostics.¹ The studies also of natural science and of medicine were implicated with Hermetic theories, dangerous and unsuitable as these had been considered by the orthodox in religion and science. Henry Vaughan writes that 'the most serious of our profession' (the profession which he shares with Browne and that 'famous and faithfull Chymist, Henry Nollus,'² whose work he translated) 'have not only an unkindness for, but are persecutors of Astrologie.'³ Yet on the other hand the Hermetists themselves are careful not only to defend their practice from the charge of necromancy, but generally to profess religious orthodoxy. It is against the Galenists rather than the Catholics that Paracelsus protests; and Agrippa, though he like Paracelsus was regarded as a dangerous magician, sums up the points of the Catholic creed in the third book of his *Occult Philosophy*. Many minor Hermetists make allegory of their alchemy, explaining their 'mystery' in terms of the Christian mystery, as on a larger scale Jacob Boehme images the 'three principles of the divine essence,'⁴ and the 'threefold life of man'⁵ in terms of the chemical trinity of sulphur, mercury, and salt. Sometimes the work of the 'tincture' is made to represent the work of redemption, as Donne uses it in his poem of 'Resurrection, imperfect.'

Hee was all gold when he lay downe, but rose
 All tincture, and doth not alone dispose
 Leaden and iron wills to good, but is
 Of power to make even sinfull flesh like his.⁶

¹ Compare the account of this in *Milton, Man and Thinker*, by Denis Saurat (London, 1925).

² Title-page to the translation of *Hermetical Physick*, Vaughan, II, 547.

³ Letter to Aubrey. Vaughan, II, 672.

⁴ Boehme, *The Three Principles of the Divine Essence*. English edition, 1648.

⁵ *Ibid.*, *The Threefold Life of Man*. English edition, 1650.

⁶ Donne, *Poems*, I, 334.

And in one of Thomas Vaughan's treatises—an example among many such in this writer—two of the secret symbols of alchemy, Dragon and Serpent (sulphur and mercury), are converted to the use of Christian allegory. Satan is the false serpent tempting to the forbidden tree and the spurious title of godhead. 'But 'tis not this *subtill* Dragon, but *Bonus ille Serpens*, that *good, Crucified Serpent*, that can give us both this *Knowledge*, and this *Title*.'¹ Again the reader is reminded of the tone of metaphor in Donne's sermons ; and here, in fact, there is an actual parallel. Donne speaks of 'this Serpent, this creeping Serpent,' and of 'the other Serpent, the crucified Serpent' in one of the *Fifty Sermons*. 'That creeping Serpent, Satan, is war, and should be so ; the crucified Serpent Christ Jesus is peace, and shall be so for ever. The creeping Serpent eats our dust, the strength of our bodies, in sicknesses, and our glory in dust, the dust of the grave : The crucified Serpent hath taken our flesh, and our blood, and given us his flesh, and his blood for it.'² The religious, mystery-loving century brought its religion and its magic into closer touch, and some refinement of material has taken place between the 'occult' work of Paracelsus and that of Thomas Vaughan. Vaughan the poet, as we have remarked, refines still further, and when he would go 'in a thought' 'To heav'n, or Earth below To reade some *Starre*, or Min'rall,'³ takes only the light and winged part of the philosophy.

Agrippa writes in one place of how the mind,

¹ T. Vaughan, *Magia Adamica*, p. 40. It may be noticed in passing that one of the ancient indictments against alchemy presented it as tempting pre-eminently to forbidden knowledge.

² Donne, *Fifty Sermons*, p. 445.

³ 'Resurrection and Immortality,' II, 402. Compare T. Vaughan, *Anthroposophia Theomagica*, p. 46 : 'She' (the soul) 'spans kingdoms in a Thought.'

lifting itself up, can search all the 'stations, grounds, causes and sciences of things,' and behold them 'as it were in a certain glass of Eternity (*tanquam in quodam aeternitati specula*).¹ Vaughan tells in one poem how he was shown in 'a strange glass'

That busie commerce kept between
God and his Creatures, though unseen.²

And this is his special standpoint, and the substance of much of his religion. His 'glass' is unique because the 'commerce' is so intimate that it reveals, and because rays from the Hermetic and the Catholic teaching meet at the angle of his inner experience. But the very need to search himself while he searches Nature, though in his case an emotional need and the outcome of converging impulses and resulting in individual discoveries, has its parallel in the inculcations of Hermetic teaching, which at its most consistent and philosophical has much to say of the penetrative power of man's mind. For man, entering into himself, shall inherit all the earth. 'Whosoever therefore shall know himself, shall know all things in himself; especially he shall know God, according to whose Image he was made; he shall know the world, the resemblance of which he beareth; he shall know all creatures, with which he symboliseth; and what comfort he can have and obtain, from Stones, Plants, Animals, elements, Heavens, from Spirits (*a demonibus*), Angels, and every thing.'³ Agrippa's 'fomentum' suggests almost a physical 'comfort,' like Vaughan's 'tye of Bodyes.' And the latter's deep sympathy with Nature has its parallel again in the theoretic 'sympathy' of the Hermetists, which again in its turn springs from another theory, a central theory in occult beliefs, the

¹ Agrippa, *Occult Philosophy*, trans. J.F., p. 367.

² 'The Stone,' II, 514.

³ Agrippa, p. 460.

starting-point for the philosophy of Agrippa and the practice of Paracelsus, but an item of scholastic philosophy before their day.

'He shall know the world, the resemblance of which he beareth.' The theory of the microcosm and the macrocosm—that man, the 'little world,' includes all parts and elements of the greater world—permeated literature, and by no means only Hermetic or scholastic literature, of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It agreed with the idealistic temper of the age as well as with the passion for 'ratiocination' and spiritual diagram which was a scholastic legacy. As George Herbert puts it,

Man is all symmetric,
Full of proportions, one limbe to another,
And all to all the world besides.
Each part may call the farthest, brother ;
For hand with foot hath private amitie,
And both with moons and tides.¹

'This body is an illustration of all Nature'² says Donne too in one of his sermons, and in his rapt preoccupied fashion, he illustrates the cosmos from his own body in the *Devotions*³ he wrote during an illness. The theory was presented popularly in crude physical diagram in the astrologers' almanacs, where the parts and organs of man's body were mapped out under the seven planets and twelve signs ; it was worked out in similar if more scientific fashion in the second book of Agrippa's *Occult Philosophy* ; yet its farthest implications were mystical. Valentine Weigel sets forth these results with comparative simplicity in the little treatise of *Astrologie Theologised*, which was published in England in 1649.

¹ 'Man.' Herbert, II, 217.

² Donne, *LXXX Sermons*, p. 823.

³ *Devotions*, ed. J. Sparrow, Cambridge, 1923.

The *subject of Astrologie* therefore is double ; the Macrocosm and Microcosm, the greater World, and the lesser World.¹

Both these worlds are 'twofold' ; 'visible according to the body, invisible according to the soule or spirit.'²

Man, as to his body, is composed of the Elements, and as to his soul, of the Starrs.³

Whatsoever is without a man, the same is also within him . . . although the Macrocosme is without us, yet nevertheless it may also be found truly within us.⁴

Nor are we, nor do wee inhabit, walk and live in anything els, save in that whereof we are made.⁵

So God is whole without us, and also whole within us. . . . We have God every where with us, whether we know it, or know it not.⁶

Weigel as a mystic draws the idea out to its full conclusions. So Jacob Boehme writes : ' *If this whole or universal Bbeing, bee not God, then thou art not Gods Image : If he be any other or strange God, then thou hast no part in him : For thou art created out of this God, and livest in this very God . . . also all thy knowledge standeth in this God, and when thou dyest, then thou art Buried in this God . . . How shall that strange God, out of whom thou art not created, and in whom thou didst never Live, bring thy Body and Spirit together again ?* ' '7

Vaughan has not much to say directly of microcosm and macrocosm, though in ' Affliction ' he claims that God displays in his ' greater world ' what he ' would do ' in the ' lesser, ' man ;⁸ and in ' Man's fall, and Recovery ' he makes the individual typical of the race, blending his own experience with that of Adam, the prototype

¹ Weigel, p. 5.

² Ibid., p. 5.

³ Ibid., p. 6.

⁴ Ibid., p. 7.

⁵ Ibid., p. 8.

⁶ Ibid., p. 8.

⁷ Boehme, *Aurora*, p. 539.

⁸ II, 459.

and the first microcosm.¹ In another poem, imaging some of Nature's events, he shows how all Nature can be an illustration of man. 'How is man parcell'd out? how ev'ry hour Shows him himself.'² And throughout his poetry the changes in the natural scene become symbols of man's chequered inward life—'This late, long heat';³ or the moisture from the mountain lake which like the poet's own too slothful prayer is unable to reach heaven, and can only descend in rain and weep for its 'mistake';⁴ or the 'rainy, weeping day' which resembles man's whole life on earth.⁵ But when he would be more technical in phraseology he writes of the 'inclosed Spirit' which inhabits some creatures (in this poem, 'hills and valleys, birds, and poor stones'), and is to each 'a star Inlightning his own little sphaere.'⁶ This is in strict accordance with Hermetic doctrine; for the microcosm had its 'stars' corresponding to the stars of the macrocosm, and in its threefold life it possessed a 'sydereal spirit' which corresponded to the celestial or starry sphere of the macrocosm. The greater and lesser worlds corresponded both in outline and in detail—in outline because each was threefold, the universe being intellectual or angelic, celestial or starry, and terrestrial or elementary, and the man composed of an 'elemented' body, an immortal soul, and a sydereal spirit which acted as medium between soul and body; in detail because all the parts and elements of the macrocosm were comprised (virtually, not materially) in man. This correspondence, with the 'sympathy' it involves, is the secret of the Hermetic medicine. 'Herbs gladly cure our flesh, because that they Find their acquaintance there.'⁷

¹ II. 411.

² 'The Tempest,' II, 460.

³ Ibid.

⁴ 'The Showre,' II, 412.

⁵ 'The Timber,' II, 498.

⁶ 'The Bird,' II, 497.

⁷ Herbert, 'Man,' II, 219.

God too, as Weigel and Boehme maintain, is 'whole within us.' Or at least there is a divine spark, like the 'synteresis' of some older writers among the mystics. Closely allied with the synteresis in nature, though considered scientifically as well as spiritually, is the 'quintessence' of the Hermetists, that fine and pure and hidden essence which preserves each creature from corruption, 'a matter most subtly purged of all impurities and mortality.'¹ It is not, as Agrippa tells us, generated 'from the four Elements, but a certain first thing, having its being above, and besides them.'² It appears as something on the boundary-line between matter and spirit ; it also sums up in little the whole creation and the whole world. Thus the earth from which Adam, the first microcosm, was made was 'a meer quintessence, extracted from every part, from the whole frame of the whole world.'³ We are back again with the microcosm and the macrocosm ; and indeed many of the terms of this philosophy resolve themselves out as various aspects of one elusive ideal quantity, which to philosophers and practitioners seemed to hold the secret of life ; and which we to-day might relate to the theory of the germ-plasm.

In man the quintessence is the link between soul and body ; 'that spirit lives and moves in all elementary creatures, and is the indissoluble bond of body and soul, the purest and most noble essence in which lie hid all mysteries in their inexhaustible fulness of marvellous virtue and efficacy.'⁴ Similarly, in the universe the quintessence draws the Soul of the World⁵ from the higher to the lower sphere. For as the Catholics, from Aquinas to many minor mediaeval

¹ Paracelsus, ed. Waite, vol. II, p. 22.

² Agrippa, p. 33.

³ Weigel, p. 19. With 'meer' compare Lat. *merus*.

⁴ *The Sophic Hydrolith. Hermetic Museum*, I, 78.

⁵ The third principle of the Divine Being, as in the Gnostic and Plotinian theories.

writers, saw the creation as a 'ladder' or 'scale' reaching through various rungs of being to the throne of God, the mystic and Hermetic philosophers, from Plotinus to the workers and explorers of Vaughan's own day, saw the living Spirit stoop descending through all things to inform them and link them together—the descent which Thomas Vaughan describes in image as 'that most secret and silent Laps of the *Spirit per Formarum naturalium Seriem*.'¹ This Spirit, which the same writer in his treatise *Lumen de Lumine* calls the '*Light of Nature*,'² is in another figure the '*secret Candle of God*, which hee hath tinn'd in the *Elements*,' to which 'Every naturall Body is a kind of *Black Lanthorne*.'³

When in his poem 'Resurrection and Immortality' Henry Vaughan describes how 'a preserving spirit doth still passe Untainted through this Masse'⁴ (i.e., this mass of corporal Nature), he refers to this unifying and cleansing spirit, or quintessence, or 'tincture.' And in 'The Sap,' like Donne and others, he figures Christ's redemption and sacrament under this symbol in all its implications.

To shew what strange love he had to our good,
 He gave his sacred bloud,
 By wil our sap, and Cordial ; now in this
 Lies such a heav'n of bliss,
 That, who but truly tastes it, no decay
 Can touch him any way,
 Such secret life and vertue in it lies,
 It wil exalt and rise
 And actuate such spirits as are shed
 Or ready to be dead. . . .⁵

The 'tincture,' again, is an essence of kindred nature

¹ T. Vaughan, *Anthroposophia Theomagia*, p. 45.

² Ibid., p. 41.

⁴ II, 401.

³ Ibid., *Lumen de Lumine*, p. 41.

⁵ II, 475.

to the quintessence, claimed by the alchemists to be reached in their last process, and of itself 'a thing that separateth, and bringeth the pure and cleere, from the impure : and that bringeth the life of all sorts of Spirits, or all sorts of Essences, into its highest . . . degree. . . . Yea it is the cause of the shining, or of the lustre : it is a cause that all creatures see and live.'¹ So, in the opening of Vaughan's 'Repentance'—

Lord, since thou didst in this vile Clay
That sacred Ray
Thy spirit plant, quickning the whole
With that one grains infused wealth²

—the 'grain' is a spiritual 'tincture,' imaged as light, as Boehme images it in the passage just quoted. And by this 'tincture,' this 'little grain' that 'shines and sings,' the cock in 'Cock-crowing' is impelled to await and greet the first ray of the sun.

Their eyes watch for the morning hue,
Their little grain expelling night
So shines and sings, as if it knew
The path unto the house of light.
It seems their candle, howe'r done,
Was tinn'd and lighted at the sunne.³

And night, to use again Boehme's image, is the 'impure' mass which the 'pure and cleere' light resolves.

More than any poem in *Silex Scintillans*, 'Cock-crowing' is steeped in Hermetic tradition and then sublimated. Vaughan has caught his brother's figure of the 'Candle . . . tinn'd in the *Elements*.' The 'house of light' too, simply and inevitably as it appears here, belongs to astrology.⁴ And not only so,

¹ Boehme, *The Three Principles*, p. 105.

² II, 448.

³ 'Cock-crowing,' II, 488.

⁴ Thomas Vaughan is thought to be the author of a little book called *Aula Lucis*, which appeared in 1652, subscribed 'S.N. a Modern Speculator.' Internal evidence of style points to him, as well as Wood's ascription (*Athenae Oxonienses*, III, col. 724).

but there is a further close correspondence between this poem and Thomas Vaughan's *Anima Magica Abscondita*, where the author describes a certain 'Spirituell Metaphysicall Graine,' a 'Seed or Glance of Light,'¹ which guides the 'universall spirit of Nature'² 'in her Operations';³ and this 'Seed,' or 'Glance,' is descended from the 'first Father of Lights.'⁴

Father of lights ! what Sunnie seed,
What glance of day hast thou confin'd
Into this bird !

—so Henry Vaughan's poem begins. His brother continues : 'For though his *full-ey'd* Love shines on nothing but Man, yet every thing in the World is in some measure directed for his Preservation by a *Spice* or *touch* of the *first Intellect*.'⁵ And then we find that this further image from the prose treatise has its parallel too in the poem ; but that there, after a fashion we shall have again to notice, the poet has for his own case reversed the relations described, of man as chief recipient of divine light and love, and the rest of Nature recipient only to assist man's 'Preservation' ; and that while, impelled by that 'immortal light and heat' 'Whose hand so shines through all this frame' of the world, the bird's 'Pulse' 'beats still for light,' he, Vaughan himself, is hampered by a 'veil.'

This veyle thy full-ey'd love denies,
And onely gleams and fractions spies.⁶

Vaughan always transmutes his Hermetic tradition in some personal and intimate manner. His cock here

¹ T. Vaughan, *Anima Magica Abscondita*, p. 13.

² *Ibid.*, p. 10.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁴ *Anima Magica Abscondita*, p. 13. ⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Again, in another of Thomas Vaughan's treatises, there is mention of 'a Veil over the Face,' with which 'We are all born.' And 'This is it, which hinders the prospect of that Intellectual shining Light, which God hath placed in us' (*Anthroposophia Theomagia*, pp. 37-38).

'dreams of Paradise' because all the creatures in his world—sun, stars, birds, and all of Nature except man—are pictured as belonging in some sort to that Eden-life of which we have spoken, and which symbolises Vaughan's own desire. But meanwhile the cock also 'dreams of light' because, according to Hermetic tradition, he is a 'solary' bird, and under the special influence of the sun.

To all the breed
This busie Ray thou hast assign'd ;
Their magnetisme works all night,
And dreams of Paradise and light.

And here we are brought to those Hermetic theories of 'sympathy,' 'magnetism,' and 'influence,' which underlie so many of his poems, and are themselves underpropped in his case by a fundamental personal emotion.

In the threefold world of the Hermetists, the terrestrial, celestial, and intellectual spheres are linked in one, as in the philosophy of Plotinus each lower grade of being involves a higher grade on which it is dependent. And thus each creature in the terrestrial sphere is a type of some higher creature ; for 'Everywhere there is an unbroken system of correspondence. Every object in the material world is an analogue, a symbol or counterpart, of some higher reality in the starry heavens, and this again of some law of the angelic life in the world beyond the stars.'¹ Each creature bears the 'character' or hieroglyph of its star ; it bears a 'signature,' which determines its outward form. The 'signature,' another term in the occult philosophy, is, as Boehme describes it, 'the Receptacle, Container or Cabinet of the Spirit' ;² and 'The whole outward

¹ W. Pater, *The Renaissance*, p. 49 (Chapter on Pico della Mirandola).

² Boehme, *Signatura Rerum*, p. 2.

visible World with all its Being is a Signature, or Figure of the inward spiritual World';¹ or, in Thomas Vaughan's account, 'The inferior principles bear witness of the superior. They are signatures and created books where wee may reade the mysteries of the supernaturall Trinitie.'² The stars and planets take the sublunary world in charge, and each planet has as it were a 'cure' of small terrestrial 'souls.' 'Every thing therefore hath its Character pressed upon it by its Star for some peculiar effect, especially by that Star which doth principally govern it: And these Characters contain, and retain in them the peculiar natures, vertues, and roots of their Stars, and produce the like operations upon other things, on which they are reflected.'³ So the cock in Vaughan's poem has the power, being a solary bird, of reacting to the sun's first ray, and its own 'magnetism' draws that ray; while other planets and stars shed influence on other magnetic creatures. 'There is not an *Herb* here *below*, but he hath a *star* in *Heaven above*, and the *star* strikes him with her *Beame* and sayes to him, *Grow*.'⁴ Thomas Vaughan visualises the event (which modern science says may have taken a thousand years to happen)⁵ with the quick child-like imagination of a poet. His poet-brother writes how some 'kinde herbs'—'kind' in that word's original sense—'Watch for, and know their loving star.'⁶ Both of them meditate this interaction—the 'magnetism' of the plant attracting the

¹ Ibid., p. 77.

² Agrippa, pp. 65–66.

³ T. Vaughan, *Magia Adamica*, p. 96.

⁴ T. Vaughan, *Lumen de Lumine*, p. 88.

⁵ 'The light from a distant star is absorbed by a molecule of chlorophyll which has recently been produced in a living plant. We say that the light from the star was on its way towards us a thousand years ago. What rapport can there be between the emitting source and the newly-made molecule of chlorophyll?' (G. N. Lewis, *The Anatomy of Science* (Oxford, 1926), pp. 129–30.)

⁶ 'The Favour,' II, 492.

star ; the 'influence' of the star directing the plant ; the mutual 'sympathy' which exists between them—with peculiarly loving interest.

Look up then to *Heaven*, and when thou seest the *Celestiall fires* move in their swift and glorious *Circles*, think also there are here *below* some *cold Natures*, which they *over look*, and about which they *move* incessantly to *heat*, and *concoct* them.¹

The 'natures' are of course only *elementally* cold, like the object of the star in Henry Vaughan's poem addressed to that star.

there's in it a restless, pure desire
And longing for thy bright and vitall fire,
Desire that never will be quench'd,
Nor can be writh'd, nor wrench'd.²

Vaughan does more than entertain these beliefs in thought. He lives them in emotion, and then images them in poetry. The result lies not so much in frequency of direct reference to Hermetic tradition as in a charging of his poetic atmosphere with this idea of 'sympathy.' Meeting, as we think, some predisposition in himself, it becomes an intuitive knowledge, like an inward sense of touch, directed towards the objects of Nature.

¹ T. Vaughan, *Magia Adamica*, Sig. B5b.

² 'The Starre,' II, 489.

V

When I take up a stone or clod of earth and look upon it ;
then I see that which is above, and that which is below, yea,
the whole world therein.¹

THIS is Jacob Boehme's extended theory of the microcosm ; Vaughan would have endorsed it ; Traherne too writes of the wonders to be found in a 'grain of sand.'² 'You never enjoy the world aright, till you see how a sand exhibiteth the wisdom and power of God.' Emile Boutroux in an essay on Boehme discusses the latter's outlook upon Nature :

The stars, the sun, the elements of the earth, life everywhere, in its origin and in every one of its phases, the growing tree, the animal with its desires and disinterested instincts, man with his inner life . . . all these things Boehme contemplates and meditates upon, and in this immediate and religious communion with nature, waits for her to infuse into him her own spirit and reveal the mysteries of being. It is eternal, interior, and living being that he seeks everywhere and in all things. Thus, the phenomena of Nature . . . are signs for him to decipher, not the object about which knowledge is sought.³

Vaughan too is seeking interior and eternal being in

¹ Boehme, *Mysterium Magnum*, p. 4. ² Traherne, *Centuries*, p. 19.

³ Boutroux, *Historical Studies in Philosophy*, trans. Rothwell, p. 174. So Boehme's seventeenth-century biographer relates how 'going abroad into the Fields . . . and viewing the Herbs and Grass of the field, in his inward Light, he saw into their Essences, use and properties. . . . In like manner did he behold the whole Creation' (*The Life of Jacob Behmen*, by Durand Hotham, Sig. D3a).

Nature, and, as we have found, he does not image Nature for the sake of the phenomenal object as such alone. In this sense for him as for Boehme natural phenomena are 'signs . . . to decipher,' and books carrying upon them the mysterious signature.

Thrice happy he who, not mistook,
Hath read in *Natures mystic Book*.¹

So Marvell wrote in the lines 'Upon Appleton House.' And the idea of the 'Book of Nature' or the 'Book of the Creatures' is an old one, though the Book itself shows variant readings. We may trace some of these backward a little way.

If we should first ask in what form 'Nature' appears in the literature of Vaughan's or the preceding age, we should find a variety of images clustering round, roughly speaking, two or three conceptions. There is nothing so great and single at once as the figure in Plotinus of the giant creatress, herself under higher compulsion, and brooding 'inactive' on a vision which is self-intuition,² though the massive, elusive being of Spenser's *Mutabilitie* cantos is the nearest to her in stature. On the other hand there is nothing quite like the Nature of the Romantic writers, for seventeenth century 'Nature' is still partly under the dominion of theology and scholasticism. 'Nature' might be, vaguely and platonically, the 'body of God'; or God and Nature might be identified even, as in Spinoza; or Nature might be 'the *Instrument* of the still Eternity, wherewith it formeth, maketh and distinguisheth, and therein compacteth itself into a kingdom of joy.'³ Donne, with his concrete imagination and his love of hierarchies in Church and State, presents a lesser figure—Nature as God's 'Vice-

¹ Marvell, p. 77.

² Boehme, *Concerning the Election*,

³ Plotinus, trans. Mackenna, II, 123.

p. 12.

gerent,¹ or his 'owne Lieutenant.'² Agrippa describes a 'magicianess' who understands the hid dispositions of matter, and knows how to bring all into a harmony.³ Thomas Vaughan, who writes much of Nature, pictures her now as a goddess, receiving him as devotee into her temple,⁴ now as a wayward and bewitching being, sporting with herself as '*Little Children*, who are newly come from under *her hand*' can sport—'a *free spirit*, that seeks no Applause . . . pleased with her *own Magic*, as *Philosophers* are with their *Secret Philosophie*,' and 'busie, not onely in the *Potts* of the *Balconies*, but in *Wildernesses*, and ruinous *places* where no *eyes* observe her, but the *Starrs* and *Planets*.'⁵ Vaughan the poet does not present a philosophical conception; he writes himself that he 'attends upon' Nature rather than 'speculates.'⁶ He does not even personify this 'Nature' in a complete image. But he never sees her other than personally, and alive and sentient through all her parts the creatures.

my volumes sed
They were all dull, and dead,
They judg'd them senselesse, and their state
Wholly inanimate.
Go, go ; Seal up thy looks,
And burn thy Books.⁷

'Seal up thy looks,' because he is searching for the invisible world, not 'The skinne, and shell of things';⁸ but on the other hand, 'burn thy Books,' because the

¹ Donne, *XXVI Sermons*, p. 52.

² Ibid., 'Goodfriday, 1613, Riding Westward,' *Poems*, I, 336.

³ Agrippa, p. 74.

⁴ T. Vaughan, in *Lumen de Lumine*.

⁵ T. Vaughan, *Magia Adamica*, pp. 91-92.

⁶ See letter to Aubrey, Vaughan, II, 672.

⁷ 'And do they so ? Have they a Sense ?' II, 432.

⁸ 'The Search,' II, 407.

creatures can only be known through loving, immediate intercourse.

There is an old *Liber Creatorum* written by that Raymond of Sebonde¹ whom Montaigne translated, and who but for Montaigne might be now quite forgotten. In that 'Book' of his, each creature appears as a letter made by the finger of God, and man the chief letter;² but, though the writer stresses the accepted superiority of man to the rest of the creatures man will do well to learn from that Book, for in so far as he studies it, he may the better know himself and God. Withdrawing himself from the creatures, he loses touch with both himself and God.³ Donne knew Sebonde,⁴ and possibly others in Donne's age might know him; there are passages not unlike things in the *Centuries of Meditations*, though unsuffused with Traherne's peculiar radiance of temper. Yet the Spanish writer's love of Nature is apparent, and suggests some intimacy, and makes that part of his book which deals with the 'creatures' superior in interest to the strictly theological part. He does not suggest—for though not narrowly scholastic he is orthodox here—anything animistic in the universe. The flower does not *enjoy* the air it breathes. Even with Traherne the rejoicing of Nature has no independence of the soul of man; and Henry More, whose tenderness grieves over 'fading plants,'⁵ knows still that these have no conscious life. 'They never found Themselves when first they peer'd in sunny day; Nor never sought them-

¹ 'A Spaniard, who about two hundred years since professed Physicke in Thoulouse.' (Montaigne, trans. Florio, II, 129.)

² Sebonde. Prologue, Sig. Aza.

³ 'quia quanto magis appropinquas te ad creaturas eas cognoscendo tanto magis appropinquabis ad te ipsum et ad tuum conditorem. Et quanto magis elongas te a creaturis tanto magis elongas te a teipso et a tuo conditore.' (Sebonde, Tit. LIX, Sig. Erb.)

⁴ *Essays in Divinity*, pp. 7-8.

⁵ More, *Psychathanasia*, p. 26.

selves' ;¹ and though trees have 'life Sympatheticall,' they have no 'animadversive sense'² to feel and react. Yet the lingering 'soul' of Vaughan's tree in 'The Timber' feels dimly the presence of 'great storms' in Nature, with a 'strange resentment' like that with which in the occult tradition the 'astral soul' of the dead might resent an injury to its corpse, or as that corpse itself might 'animadvert' to the presence of its murderer.

Man, pleads the old Spanish writer, should love the creatures as their brother. 'Illas enim debet amare, et cogitare similitudines quam habet et fraternitatem.'³ He pictures them as endeavouring to persuade man that in taking their services he should recognise them, and that it is his part to intercede and give thanks not only for himself but for all the creatures.⁴ Such appears the natural point of view for the religiously-minded in Vaughan's own century ; for 'one singular End of man's creation is that he may be a *Priest* in this magnificent *Temple* of the *Universe*, and send up Prayers and praises to the great Creator of all things in behalf of the rest of the Creatures.'⁵ And is not man 'the Centre of the Creatures, and the Circle of them all' ? 'For all things in the world doe not onely look to him as their Guide and Governour, for whom also they were all created ; but like wise on him all the Sphaeres bestow their beams, operations, reflections and influences, and on him all the Creatures poure their vertues and effects as upon a middle Point and Retinacle or that by which they are stayed and supported.'⁶

¹ More, *Psychathanasia*, p. 11.

² *Ibid.*, p. 14.

³ Sebonde, Tit. LIX, Sig. Era.

⁴ *Ibid.*, Tit. XCVI, Sig. G3b. With his 'Et sic omnes creature clamant et testificantur,' etc., compare Traherne's 'They daily cry in a living manner, with a silent and yet most loud voice, We are all His gifts.' (*Centuries*, p. 101.)

⁵ More, *An Antidote against Atheism*, p. 85.

⁶ Oswald Crollius, *The Mysteries of Nature*, p. 56.

The picture given by the 'chemist' Crollius suggests vividly an astrological diagram.

It is rather noteworthy that Sebonde's translator, with his infinite curiosity and his indifference to accepted standards, reverses these positions. Through 'vanity' alone man, ignoble and dependent as he is, 'ascribeth divine conditions unto himselfe,' and 'selecteth and separateth himselfe from out the ranks of other creatures ; to which his fellow-brethren and compeers, he cuts out and shareth their parts . . . How knoweth he by the vertue of his understanding the inward and secret motions of beasts ?'¹ But to most, even the sensitive, of the seventeenth century, the creatures, whether for beauty or for use, have little or no significance apart from man. Donne could hardly be expected to be anything but incredulous of the legend of St. Francis. 'They will needs make us believe, that St. *Francis* preached to Birds, and Beasts, and Stones ; but they will not go about to make us believe that those Birds, and Beasts, and Stones joyned with *St. Francis* in prayer . . . of all onely Man can speak to God.'² George Herbert, who himself loved and marked the life of Nature, writes in 'Providence' :

Beasts fain would sing ; birds dittie to their notes ;
Trees would be tuning on their native lute
To thy renown ; but all their hands and throats
Are brought to Man, while they are lame and mute.³

Then, repeating the thought we have already met in More and Sebonde, he proceeds :

Man is the world's high Priest. He doth present
The sacrifice for all.

And Vaughan echoes Herbert, as he so often echoes

¹ Montaigne, trans. Florio, II, 144. ² Herbert, III, 79.

³ Donne, *XXVI Sermons*, p. 31.

him, in his poem called 'Christ's Nativity'¹—'Man is their high-priest.' But immediately afterwards he forgoes his office, and begins to plead himself the least of their disciples.

I would I were some *Bird* or *Star*,
 Flutt'ring in woods, or lifted far
 Above this *Inne*
 And Rode of sin !
 Then either *Star*, or *Bird*, should be
 Shining, or singing still to thee.

Or again,

I would I were a stone, or tree,
 Or flowre by pedigree,
 Or some poor high-way herb, or Spring
 To flow, or bird to sing. . . .²

The 'ladder' with which good Catholics begin their Books of Nature is reversed in his poetry, and 'All have their *keyes*, and set *ascents*'; but man 'Sleeps at the ladders foot.'³ For the creatures all move in harmony; they have kept their magic correspondence.

Thy other Creatures in this Scene
 Thee only aym, and mean ;⁴

But I am sadly loose, and stray
 A giddy blast each way ;⁵

There are 'some stones' which even 'in the darkest nights point to their homes';⁶ but man, in theology and cosmology the centre of the universe, has lost his way, and 'knocks at all door-, strays and roams.'⁷

¹ II, 442.

² 'And do they so ? Have they a Sense ?' II, 432.

³ 'The Tempest,' II, 461.

⁴ 'And do they so ? Have they a Sense ?' II, 432.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ 'Man,' II, 477. ⁷ Ibid.

And 'hearts are not so kind,' i.e., 'true to their heavenly kin,' as herbs.¹

Here in passing we may notice that Bunyan amidst his spiritual conflicts finds man, though 'the most noble by Creation of all creatures in the visible World,' changed by sin to 'the most ignoble.' 'The beasts, birds, fishes, etc., I blessed their condition, for they had not a sinful nature, they were not obnoxious to the wrath of God.'² And in Ramón Lull's *Tree of Love*, the Lover and the 'ladies of love' turn away from the city; 'And their will was to leave the world, and to be no more among men, but rather to dwell with birds, beasts and trees, for these dishonour not the Beloved.'³ Vaughan is not without antecedents and parallels in his notice and love of Nature, but the love itself appears differently compounded. It appears unique in its consistent attitude of discipleship, and in that 'sympathy' we have tried to describe which, trained in the Hermetic tradition as it is, we recognise for inherent and instinctive. When—in the familiar picture of 'The Retreat'—

on some gilded *Cloud*, or *flowre*
My gazing soul would dwell an houre,
And in those weaker glories spy
Some shadows of eternity⁴

he is apprehending in the way that Traherne apprehends in the *Centuries*. But whereas Traherne or Henry More seem to drink in beauty above all from the eye—

Fresh varnish'd groves, tall hills, and gilded clouds
Arching an eielid for the gloring morn⁵

—and so make the rarified sense of sight chief mediator to their central joy, Vaughan himself might be said,

¹ 'Sure, there's a tye of Bodyes!' II, 429.

² Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, p. 321.

³ Ramón Lull, *The Tree of Love*, trans. Peers, p. 99.

⁴ II, 419.

⁵ More, *Psychathanasia*, p. 62.

like More's own 'Psyche,' to see by 'tactuell' sight,¹ not needing so much the 'secondary'² kind of vision. His world indeed is made up of outward vision and of the dream directing it, through which he feels his way to the heart of the creatures, to the dim spark of sentience which he thinks still lurks in the dead timber;³ the vital spark which kindles the cock, the bird of dawning;⁴ or the wisdom of the smaller nesting bird pillowing its head on its wing through a night of storm.⁵ Turning back to the obscure Spaniard's *Book of the Creatures*, we find Sebonde saying that man to explore these creatures fully should '*fricare animam suam cum eis*.'⁶ Vaughan does—in this quaint phrase—'rub his soul against'⁷ the creatures; and strives with the common desire of the mystic to pass within his object, as at the end of his poem 'The Night' he strives to pass within the Divine. There is a poem in the second part of *Silex Scintillans* called 'The Book,'⁸ which reveals this intimacy with a curious beauty, quiet, matter-of-fact, but almost startling. The 'Book' is here an actual volume, on which the poet's 'gazing soul' has fallen, while he meditates backward through its history to the once living material of which it is made, which lived in the Divine regard, and, he would think, in some sense lives so still.

Thou knew'st this *papyr*, when it was
 Meer *seed*, and after that but *grass*;
 Before 'twas *drest*, or *spun*, and when
 Made *linen*, who did *wear* it then :

¹ Ibid., p. 61.

⁴ 'Cock-crowing,' II, 488.

² Ibid., p. 61.

⁵ 'The Bird,' II, 496.

³ 'The Timber,' II, 497.

⁶ Sebonde, Tit. LIX, Sig. Era.

⁷ My attention was drawn to this phrase and to a study of Sebonde himself through reading Prof. C. C. J. Webb's *Studies in the History of Natural Theology* (Oxford, 1915).

⁸ II, 540.

. . . Thou knew'st this *Tree*, when a green *shade*
Cover'd it, since a *Cover* made,
And where it flourish'd, grew and spread,
As if it never should be dead.

Thou knew'st this harmless *beast*, when he
Did live and feed by thy decree
On each green thing ; then slept (well fed)
Cloth'd with this *skin*, which now lies spread
A *Covering* o're this aged book.

. . . Thou knew'st and saw'st them all and though
Now scatter'd thus, dost know them so. . . .

VI

To penetrate such poems as 'The Book,' 'The Timber,' or 'The Bird' is to perceive the difference between Vaughan and his predecessors, and the peculiar quality of his thought and art. We read other poems, or read his prose translations, and for all the fineness and dignity of his prose and the unwarranted additions too that come at intervals to remind the reader that his own thought kept pace with his translation and informed it,¹ and for all his loyalty and indignation as an Anglican and the numerous poems expressing a devotion which is wistful of the peace the Anglican Church might give, we may still be best satisfied to know him as one of mixed and only half-conscious allegiances ; as one who perhaps in another age might have expressed his love of Nature without tradition Catholic or Hermetic.² Yet as far as our acquaintance can go, we see him gaining by his traditions. They make him on many sides a more sensitive beholder.

As for his specifically religious experiences, the likeness to Herbert fades on a nearer and more detailed view. Beyond that desire we have described which became conscious in his conversion, and which from vague searchings or quiet expectation deepens in 'The Night' to an embodiment in image of the culmination of desire, Vaughan is less sharply aware of

¹ For these additions, see the notes to Martin's edition.

² W. H. Hudson finds in Traherne 'a poetry which was distinctly animistic, with Christianity grafted on it' (*Far Away and Long Ago*, Chapter XVII, p. 235). Would he have proposed the same for Henry Vaughan ?

his spiritual states than Herbert, or Donne, or Bunyan. He does not suffer the terror of alienation as they do, nor in quite such an intimate and personal manner the joy of redemption under the symbol of the Cross. His religious experiences do not appear as acutely-defined problems or conflicts. There is indeed the note of exile, but there is nothing like the agony described in Herbert's 'Denial'—

O, that thou shouldst give dust a tongue
 To crie to thee,
 And then not heare it crying ! All day long
 My heart was in my knee,
 But no hearing.¹

or the tremendous appeal of Donne's 'Batter my heart, three-person'd God,'² which expresses the desire of all intense and self-conscious souls to feel the hand of mastery. It is true that in the Emblem to his book Vaughan uses an image which resembles that of the 'usurp'd town to another due' of Donne's sonnet.

Thy sieg comes sharper ; by Thy shock
 My wall's o'er thrown ;
 Thou shatter'st even my breast of rock,
 And what was stone
 Is flesh and blood. . . .³

¹ Herbert, II, 299.

² *Holy Sonnets*, XIV, Donne, Poems, I, 328.

³ Blunden's translation. *On the Poems of Henry Vaughan*, p. 62. Those interested in the relations between Henry and Thomas Vaughan might compare the Emblem to *Silex Scintillans* with a poem in the latter's *Anthroposophia Theomagica*, p. 28. There too is imaged the 'stone' become a 'springing well,' and the flint waiting for the fire of God.

Lord God ! This was a *stone*,
 as *hard* as any *One*
 Thy *Laws* in *Nature* fram'd :
 'Tis now a *springing Well*,
 and many Drops can tell,
 Since it by *Art* was tam'd.

But the sense of a divine impact comes, we think, differently to him than to Donne. Donne in his religion loves contrast, light and shade ; and to feel the great gulf between creature and creator. His sense of sin is heightened by his need of contrast ; and his God is imaged as both intensely personal and also intensely numinous. His vision is what has been called 'prophetic'¹ or 'Hebraic,' while Vaughan's is mystical, and the outcome of a need for union with the object of his worship. His God is seldom so personal and never so austere as Donne's. The image at the end of 'The Night' is rather that of the great Uncreated and Uncreating of some older mystics.

And to Vaughan man appears as an exile from Paradise ; to others of Vaughan's century man is not only exile, he is refugee ; his depravity is stressed by Catholics such as Donne and Pascal, and Puritans such as Baxter and Bunyan ; and the Fall is an outstanding fact, whether viewed literally and historically, or as with Boehme, some Hermetists and 'Platonic' writers, and perhaps some Quakers, mainly psycho-

My God ! my *Heart* is so,
'tis all of *Flint*, and no
Extract of Teares will yeeld :
Dissolve it with thy *Fire*,
that something may *aspire*,
And grow up in my *Field*.

Bare teares Ile not intreat,
But let thy *Spirits* seat
Upon these *Waters* bee,
That I new form'd with *Light*
shall move without all *Night*
Or *Excentricity*.

¹ For an illuminating distinction between these two types of religious response, compare *Pascal's Philosophy of Religion*, by C. C. J. Webb (Oxford, 1929), p. 29 ff.

logically and mystically.¹ In Nieremberg, the Jesuit writer whose *De Arte Voluntatis* Vaughan translated under the title *Of Life and Death*, the soul of man, like that same soul pictured in the *Theologia Germanica*,² sees itself as lower than the devils. 'For they did not sin against a God, who for their Sakes became an Angel, neither had they such a ful proof of his goodness : they did not sin against a God, who for them vouchsafed to be crucified : they did not sin against a God who made himself the food of their soules . . . But I have sinn'd . . . against a God . . . who dy'd for me, who wept for me upon the cross with loud out-cries, and not a joint of his body but bewailed each of my offences in the garden with teares of blood.'³

So Donne writes in one of the *Holy Sonnets*—

For I have sinn'd, and sinn'd, and onely hee,
Who could do no iniquitie, hath dyed.⁴

The thought of original sin is constant with Donne as with Augustine ; though Vaughan, we remember, is intent on his 'Angell-infancy,'⁵ and on the 'Remnant of Paradise,'⁶ lingering there. Vaughan's poetry too is, as his brother said, 'conversant' with angels ; nor is that converse alien to an age which loved to

¹ E.g., Joseph Glanville, More's disciple, describes a Fall after the manner of Cabbalistic or Gnostic speculation (*Lux Orientalis*, p. 144 ff). 'Adam' (a representative figure) sleeps ; and there is a remission of the higher powers of the soul. Then 'Eve,' the lower life, is brought forth ; and the body awakes. But Adam is still innocent, and still in Paradise, until the delights of the body betray him, and he falls from Paradise to inhabit the region of the air. A still further descent takes place in souls who are attracted towards the grosser pleasures of the lower earth.

² *Theologia Germanica*, trans. Winkworth, p. 33.

³ Nieremberg, *Of Adoration in Spirit and in Truth*, p. 49 ff.

⁴ *Holy Sonnets*, XI. Donne, *Poems*, I, 327.

⁵ 'The Retreate,' II, 419.

⁶ See p. 28.

⁷ T. Vaughan, *Magia Adamica*, p. 2. Thomas Vaughan uses the word to describe the relations between God and 'magicians,' the earliest 'magicians' being, according to tradition, the patriarchs.

speculate, to classify, to discuss the composition of angels, their hierarchies, and their exalted, extreme felicities. The *Silex* angels, however, do not much frequent the empyrean. They are rustics and spirits of the grove ; ' Each Oke and high-way knew them.'¹ They are shy spirits, whom ' foul men ' can ' drive away ' ;² but they are sociable with children, and even play with them.³ If in his reading Vaughan had ever met Jacob Boehme's description of the angels, he must have loved its unconventional and tender gaiety.

I will liken them to little *Children*, which walk in the fields in May, among the *flowers*, and pluck them, and make curious *Garlands*, and *Poseys*, carrying them in their hands *rejoycing*.⁴

One of the attractions of the life to come to Boehme is that ' We shall lead a life like children, who rejoyce and are very merry in their Sports,' and shall pass the time in ' a delightfull Recreation with the Angels.'⁵ ' There is such a kind of dancing and singing, as Children use when they hold hands, and sing and dance a round.'⁶ And in Vaughan's own ' Palm-Sunday,' while the children cry Hosanna,

their own Angels shine and sing
In a bright ring :
Such yong, sweet mirth
Makes heaven and earth
Joyn in a joyful Symphony.⁷

To Vaughan, again, the symbol of refuge for man is ' home ' or ' Eden,' as the Church is the sanctuary for that bird—a swallow, the swallow of Psalm LXXXIV—to which George Herbert compares his soul.

¹ ' Corruption,' II, 440.

² ' Childe-hood,' II, 521.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Boehme, *Aurora*, p. 239.

⁵ Boehme, *XL Questions*, p. 129.

⁶ Ibid., pp. 129-30.

⁷ II, 501.

O let me, when thy roof my soul hath hid,
O let me roost and nestle there.¹

But above all, to Puritan Bunyan, or Donne, or Herbert, or Nieremberg, or that other Jesuit writer whom also Vaughan probably knew, Hieremias Drexelius, the refuge for man the refugee is the love of Christ as redeemer.

Remember, sweet Jesus, that thou didst spread thy armes abroad upon the crosse, openedst thy breast, & didst hang down thy head. Beholde my soule forsaken by all creatures seekes refuge, and casts itself into those armes, and insinuates itself into that breast of thine.²

The Christ of the best poems in *The Temple*, of 'Love,'³ for instance, or 'The Bag,'⁴ is a very tender, human-hearted, and rather whimsical person, imaged with a mingling of familiarity with reverence, of the attitude of the humble with that of the privileged lover. Donne shows the heroic impetuosity of a Christ who could 'Come so in-gloriously . . . come . . . so selfe proditoriously' to the redemption of man,⁵ or the 'picture of Christ crucified,' where the wrath which for Donne always darkens and enhances the Divine is submerged in love, and 'Teares in his eyes quench the amazing light.'⁶ Traherne sees Christ on the cross, where 'To this poor, bleeding, naked Man did all the corn and wine, and oil, and gold and silver in the world minister in an invisible manner, even as he was exposed lying and dying upon the Cross.'⁷

The image at the end of Vaughan's 'The Night,' the 'deep but dazling darkness,' expresses, as we have seen, his fundamental desire. It is his special

¹ 'The Temper.' Herbert, II, 317.

⁵ Donne, *LXXX Sermons*, p. 65.

² Drexelius, *The Angel-Guardian's Clock*, p. 114.

⁶ Ibid. *Holy Sonnets*, XIII, Poems, I, 328.

³ Herbert, II, 401.

⁷ Traherne, *Centuries*, p. 43.

⁴ Ibid., III, 157.

apprehension of 'Christian annihilation . . . ingress into the divine shadow';¹ though not necessarily Christian in its inception. But his human Christ remains still the figure of the first stanzas of 'The Night,' of 'The Dwelling-place,'² and 'Palm-Sunday.' Among the inhabitants of his world, the dead who dispense light like stars;³ the stars and magnetic herbs and mysterious, heaven-directed stones; God-intoxicated birds; children, angels, or the 'harmless, yong and happy Ass,'⁴ that carried Christ on Palm Sunday, is the figure of Christ himself, the dweller by 'secret fountain' or 'Fair Shade,'⁵ or under the 'unhaunted' 'Tent' of night.⁶ He too like his poet is merged into his surroundings and identified with them. When in 'Palm-Sunday' appeal is made to the 'Plants of the day,' 'Whom sufferings,' i.e. storms, 'make most green and gay,' it is because

The King of grief, the man of sorrow,
Weeping still, like the wet morrow,
Your shades and freshness comes to borrow.⁷

He is imaged as an opening flower 'Within whose sacred leafs did lie The fulness of the Deity';⁸ his quality is that freshness and perennial youth which Vaughan loved in Nature and longed to recapture.

Early, while yet the *dark* was gay,
And *gilt* with stars, more trim than day :
Heav'ns *Lily*, and the Earth's chaste *Rose* :
The green, Immortal BRANCH arose ;
And in a solitary place
Bow'd to his father his bless'd face.⁹

¹ Browne, *Hydriotaphia*, p. 83.

² II, 516.

³ Compare 'Joy of my life ! While left me here,' II, 423 ; 'They are all gone into the world of light,' II, 484.

⁴ 'Palm-Sunday,' II, 502.

⁵ 'The Dwelling-Place,' II, 516.

⁶ 'The Night,' II, 523.

⁷ II, 501.

⁸ 'The Night,' II, 522.

⁹ 'The Day-spring,' II, 643.

Exploring a little further the chief paths of seventeenth-century religious thought, we find that Vaughan's attitude towards the fact of death is relevant for mention here ; because, though Vaughan's age made death its theme, and though, curiously enough, he chose for his own library an author like Nieremberg and perhaps too Drexelius, writers whose melancholy and often piercing tone is insistent on death and damnation, he himself does not in *Silex Scintillans* assume such tones. Death means corruption, but it also means unification. Here when alive man is indeed 'crumbled dust,'¹ or a 'heap of sand,'² loose and shifting, in the vagrancy and dulness of his desires, which render him incapable of steady radiance of achievement like that for instance of 'a pearle, a starre, or a rainbow.'³ The poem called 'Distraction' is an excellent example of an approved metaphysical feat, rarely so accomplished in this poet ; but throughout the poem Vaughan's need for the unifying experience is clearly shown.

As regards the dust of death, he finds that 'The Dust, of which I am a part' is one of 'Thy Creatures' ;⁴ and death is a 'Change of suits.'⁵

For no thing can to *Nothing* fall, but still
 Incorporates by skill,
 And then returns, and from the wombe of things
 Such treasure brings
 As *Phenix*-like renew'th
 Both life, and youth.⁶

The difference between his and the general contemporary attitude towards death appears due to his intuition of Earth and of this 'preserving spirit'

¹ 'Distraction,' II, 413.

² 'Church-Service,' II, 426.

³ 'Distraction.'

⁴ 'Repentance,' II, 448-9.

⁵ 'Resurrection and Immortality,' II, 401.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

which causes Nature and humanity, 'Phenix-like,' to renew their being. In some poems that deal with resurrection the expected event appears natural as morning, or the event of Spring, when 'through the dead Creatures a bed' the 'renewing breath' is blown.¹ The Day of Judgment even is

A day so fresh, so bright, so brave,
Twill show us each forgotten grave,
And make the dead, like flowers, arise
Youthful and fair to see new skies²

i.e., the 'new heaven' and 'new earth' of the Apocalypse. In fact, the dead in Vaughan's poetry are always young, and have attained to those states of simplicity, beauty and peace towards which the poet himself is always yearning. They are 'shining lights';³ they shed influence 'Like stars upon some gloomy grove,'⁴ or like a song listened to in thought after the bird has flown.⁵ The soul of a dead infant of whom he writes is like a bird that 'Flew home unstain'd by his new kin.'⁶ Another one, perhaps a dead brother, the brother whose death Thomas Vaughan mentions in *Anthroposophia Theomagia*,⁷ is imaged as 'this Prim-rose';⁸ or in a further poem where the image is more explicit, as a hidden but living and growing flower.

I digg'd about
That place where I had seen him to grow out,
And by and by
I saw the warm Recluse alone to lie
Where fresh and green
He lived of us unseen.

¹ 'Resurrection and Immortality,' II, 400.

² 'The day of Judgement,' II, 530.

³ 'Joy of my life! while left me here,' II, 423.

⁴ 'They are all gone into the world of light,' II, 484.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ 'The Burial of an Infant,' II, 450.

⁷ p. 65.

⁸ 'Thou that know'st for whom I mourne,' II, 417.

Many a question Intricate and rare
 Did I there strow,
 But all I could extort was, that he now
 Did there repair
 Such losses as befel him in this air
 And would e'r long
 Come forth most fair and young.¹

And, as here in the picture of the 'warm recluse,' Vaughan loves all images that suggest secrecy, greenness, youth, purity, and renewal—the 'Dear secret *Greenness!* nurst below Tempests and windes, and winter nights';² the purity of mornings, which in themselves are 'Mysteries';³ the mystery of children 'driving' their 'white designs';⁴ and the continual re-births of Nature. His belief in atonement is in an atonement through return to the source, and so through re-birth to universal regeneration. It is all a question of the return and the re-birth. Among the alchemists the transmutations of their art were types of re-birth; and among Protestants and Quakers the doctrine of a 'second birth' is important as part of individual experience. But with Jacob Boehme, and, though expressed less directly, with Henry Vaughan himself, re-birth or regeneration appears as the sudden advent, or the slower revelation through Nature, of a world-embracing, atoning Spirit. Beyond the belief lies the philosophy of St. Paul, and the image of the 'whole creation' 'travailing' towards a 'glorious liberty.'⁵

And therefore it is that the whole nature standeth in anguish and longing, to be freed from the vanity. . . . Because it tasteth the Paradise in it selfe, and in the Paradise the perfection, and therefore it groaneth and lifteth it selfe up towards the light of God and Paradise; and so bringeth forth

¹ 'I walkt the other day (to spend my hour),' II, 478.

³ 'Rules and Lessons,' II, 436.

⁴ 'Childe-hood,' II, 520.

² 'The Seed growing secretly,' II,

⁵ *Romans*, VIII, 19-22.

in its anguish always somewhat that is fairer, higher and new . . . and if you be not blinde, you may see this in Men, Beasts, yea even in hearbs and grasse.¹

The lyric prayer to the 'knowing, glorious spirit' at the end of Vaughan's poem 'The Book' of which we spoke looks forward to the time when the Spirit shall 'restore trees, beasts and men.'² There too the writer appeals to the 'Rock of Ages,' 'In whose shade They live unseen, when here they fade'—perhaps a more Christian rendering, and characteristic of his manner in mingling traditions, of the belief of Paracelsus in a 'mysterium Magnum,' from which all the creation was generated, and to which it will all return. In this 'great mystery' all things, even the smaller creatures, live after an eternal species.

It is opposed to all true philosophy to say that flowers lack their own eternity. They may perish and die here ; but they will re-appear in the restitution of all things. Nothing has been created out of the great mystery which will not inhabit a form beyond the aether.³

The creatures have, according to this philosopher, a perishable elemental form, and an eternal form, an 'imago extra aethere,' which shall be given them in a final 'great Mystery' (*in ultimo mysterio magno*), and by which they will be recognisable. Though the individual earthly life is to cease, the result is not unlike the 'glorified body' of the Christian resurrection. That 'truly learned and expert Physician,'⁴ Oswald Crollius, writes of a regeneration at the end of the world 'according to Soul, Spirit, and Body,' when the soul will 'sparkle and glitter out with a fiery colour like a Rubie or Carbuncle thorow the clear,

¹ Boehme, *The Three Principles*, p. 61.

³ Paracelsus, II, 269.

² 'The Book,' II, 540.

⁴ Vaughan (*Hermetical Physick*), II, 584.

spotlesse, beautifull body.'¹ And in the 'Envoy' to the second part of *Silex Scintillans* Vaughan presents, in language reminiscent of biblical image, but in some sort prophetic of Shelley in *Adonais*,² the coming of a universal radiant redemption.

Arise, arise !
And like old cloaths fold up these skies,
This long worn veyl : then shine and spread
Thy own bright self over each head,
And through thy creatures pierce and passe
Till all becomes thy cloudlesse glass,
Transparent as the purest day. . . .³

¹ Crollius, *The Mysteries of Nature*,
p. 138.

² *Adonais*, 381-7 ; 462-3.

³ 'L'Envoy,' II, 542.

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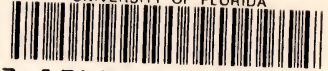
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